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Abstract

This paper explores the interaction of ethnicity and friendship in a kindergarten in England. Existing literature from different traditions (see Aboud et al 2003; van Ausdale and Feagin 2001; MacNaughton 2005) suggests that pre-school children tend to choose friends from the same ethnic group. The research was carried out using an ethnographic approach over the period of a year. The findings indicate that the children did play largely with others of the same sex and same ethnic origin. Children's friendships, sense of self and sense of other, it is suggested, emerged not from within but from experiences of the activities in which they did or did not engage. Hence the children's ethnic identities and friendships were shaped by the internalisation of what they saw and heard as they engaged in the kindergarten's activities. These led to the children's identities being performed and internalised in particular sorts of ways that marked out the children as familiar ('like us') or unfamiliar ('not like us') to others according to their previous experiences. Thus these identity performances in relation to the activities offered seemed to be internalised and to come to affect the friendships that children formed with each other.

Key words: ethnicity; young children; friendships; practices

Introduction

This paper seeks to explore the significance of ethnicity in the choices that three and four year old children make about who they play with in a kindergarten context and draws upon fieldwork carried out as the final part of my doctoral studies (see, also Xxx & Xxx 2007; Xxx 2007; Xxx 2009). It seeks to raise questions about the ways in which the relationship between ethnicity and young children's friendships has hitherto been understood. It considers the significance of internal developmental process, of children's awareness of sameness and difference and, particularly, the role of context and activity in shaping how children understand and experience friendship

and ethnicity. As McGlothlin et al (2005) note, we know relatively little about 'the extent to which race enters into children's implicit decision-making about friendship, peer interactions, and familiar everyday situations' (228) and the concern of the present paper is to engage with the complexities surrounding how children come to play with and alongside some children but not others. The discussion will centre on kindergarten activities as sites where something may be gleaned about how ethnicity relates to friendship and come to be lived out and enacted by children as they interact with others.

The study was focused on a kindergarten in the North-West of England. The vast majority of studies that have examined ethnicity and young children's friendships have done little more than to encourage children to explain or show their friendship preferences in terms of skin colour, using experimental research designs. The present study used an ethnographic approach (of which more later) to explore how young children give meaning to and negotiate their ethnicity and friendships in their everyday kindergarten situations. The kindergarten was funded by the local authority and provided 55 morning and 55 afternoon places for children from the September following their third birthdays. The children move to primary schools in the September of the school year in which they become five years of age. The kindergarten was staffed by a head teacher, two kindergarten teachers, three assistants, two assistants to support children with special educational needs, a part-time teacher to support children with English as an additional language (all of whom were White British) and three part-time (two full-time equivalent) bilingual kindergarten assistants (who spoke Punjabi and English). There was also a secretary and a caretaker (both of whom were White British). All staff were female except for the caretaker.

Drawing upon information collected by the local authority, approximately eighty per cent of the intake was Pakistani British and twenty per cent White British. Difficulties arose, however, with the more detailed local authority designations of ethnic groups, which offered 'Mirpur Pakistani', 'Kashmir Pakistani' and 'Other Pakistani' whilst virtually all of the families described themselves as 'Other Pakistani'. When attempts were made to clarify which

part of Pakistan they were from, many of the families appeared embarrassed (a sentiment also identified by Robinson and Diaz 2006). The few who gave clear answers insisted that most of the local community was from Gujarat Pakistan and some were offended that this ethnic grouping had not been listed. The lack of clarity about origins led to the decision to use the more generic term of 'Pakistani British'. The information collected also indicated that most of these families spoke Punjabi at home with a small number speaking Urdu.

Thirty - two children were observed over the period of a year from August 2005 – July 2006. The children to be studied comprised just over half the morning and just over half the afternoon class. The children were selected using two criteria. The first was gender: eight boys and eight girls were studied from each of the morning and afternoon groups. The second was ethnicity: from each session, four were White British and twelve Pakistan British, reflecting the overall ethnic mix of the kindergarten. Hence, from each session, two boys and two girls were White British and six boys and six girls were Pakistani British. The inclusion of both sexes enables some consideration of the interplay of gender and ethnicity in children's friendships. In the present study, gender and ethnicity are seen as part of a multiple, shifting and fixing network of performances which involve borders of belonging and marginalisation and which also include other identities such as age, class, culture and religion.

I accompanied the kindergarten staff on visits to the homes of these children (see also Xxxx 2007) when information was collected about the children's interests, favourite books and toys and their friends. These visits suggested that there were few if any friendships and little contact between White British and Pakistani British children and families. A week was spent in the kindergarten in early September, observing the children as they settled into the kindergarten and recording my findings as field notes. Two further days were spent observing in the kindergarten and interviewing parents in late October. Further observations and interviews with staff were carried out in November and December when the kindergarten was celebrating Eid and

Christmas. Observations of everyday kindergarten activities then followed in January, February, March, April and June. A day was also spent accompanying the children on a trip to the seaside in May.

The paper begins by considering what emerged from my observations of the children's play and considers how those findings would be explained by traditional accounts of children's friendships and choice of playmates, drawn from developmental psychology, before moving on to examine theoretical perspectives that trouble those accounts and challenge their dominance in ways of understanding young children. Consideration is then given to the methodological approach that underpinned the study. The final part of paper examines some of kindergarten's activities in more detail in order to consider how they might shape children's interactions and friendships.

Young children's friendships

Observations of the children revealed, in common with similar ethnographic research by Corsaro (1995) and Nilsen (2005), that choice of play mates was a matter of constant negotiation and renegotiation, with a few cases of enduring play friends but a great deal more that were fluid and fleeting. The following extract from my field notes illustrates this fluidity:

Zahim and Hassan and Martin drive toy cars and lorries around road map. They don't talk to each other initially. They are joined by Brandon who says 'I'm going to Morrison's and you're not'. Zahim says 'no I'm going home'. Brandon tells Hassan to 'Come on and park'. They both make car noises. They are then joined by Jack. Zahim and Hassan talk to each other in Punjabi and then Jack says to them 'I'm crashing' and crashes his car into Hassan's. Hassan and Jack drive their cars off together down the corridor.

What came to particularly interest me, however, was that, despite this example, overall these negotiations involved very little freely-chosen contact

between Pakistani British and White British children and they chose to play largely with children of the same sex and same ethnic group. When there was contact between White British and Pakistani British children, it often centred on disagreements and disputes:

Brandon and Mark play together with some other white boys with the fire engines. They do not interact with the Pakistani British boys who are also there.... Brandon and Mark later move together to the brown sand in the black tray with sieves. They say very little to each other or to the other children who are playing there – who are Pakistani British. They argue with the Pakistani British children over the equipment and Brandon and Mark leave.

In this sense, my findings could be seen to add little to existing research from a variety of perspectives. Devine et al (2008) note that there has been relatively little agreement about how ethnicity affects young children's relationships with each other and how those effects are to be explained and understood. Traditional developmental psychologists such as Aboud et al (2003) and McGlothlin et al (2005) would explain children's choice of friends in terms of internal processes relating to notions of egocentrism and the ability to decentre. The socio-cultural perspectives of Connolly (1998) and van Ausdale and Feagin (2001) would point to the significance of children's experiences in particular communities in shaping their beliefs and behaviours. Post-colonial theorists such as Cannella and Viruru (2004) and MacNaughton (2005) would examine the ways in which such differences emerge from the privileges that continue to be afforded to whiteness. It is important, therefore, to explore these theoretical stances before going on to give more information about the current study and the additional insights that it might offer into how aspects of identity such as ethnicity and gender interact with and shape children's friendships.

Theoretical Perspectives on Young Children's Friendships and Ethnicity

There have been relatively few studies of the features of young children's friendships. Drawing upon traditional theoretical perspectives, Sebanc (2003) argues that this can be explained in terms of the legacy of Piaget's view (1954, 1975) of young children as egocentric and their friendships as unstable and, therefore, seemingly unworthy of study. Where young children's friendships have been examined, the focus has often been on the development of friendship as a process within individuals, drawing upon a Piagetian stage-based approach (see for, example Selman, 1980). Another aspect to such research has been particularly concerned with explanations for and consequences of gender identification and segregation (Maccoby 1990, 1998; Underwood 2007; Underwood & Buhrmester 2007).

A smaller number of studies (see, for example, Finkelstein and Haskins 1983, Aboud 1988) have considered ethnicity and children's friendships and have concluded that children choose friends with the same skin colour. A Piagetian / constructivist bent is evident within much of this research, as noted by Kowalski (2001, 2003), with the suggestion that young children may demonstrate preferences for what is the same rather than for what is 'Other' because of egocentrism: the same (in terms of skin colour or gender) is seen as being 'good' and different is seen as being 'bad' because of the young child's difficulty in understanding other perspectives. Averhart and Bigler (1997), Aboud et al (2003) and Kowalski (2003) maintain that there is little evidence of children being negative towards other groups but do note that when choosing between their own racial group and another, young children did tend to choose friends with the same skin colour. Nesdale et al (2003) and Cameron et al (2003) argue that it is perhaps more a case of preferring children with the same skin colour than of disliking those with a different one. They claim that this means that young children are not showing prejudice, merely preference for the same. In the same vein, Aboud (2003) also argues that choosing friends with the same skin colour is not the same as rejecting friends with a different skin colour: same-skin colour friendship choice requires identification with a racial group and this, it is suggested, emerges early, whilst

rejection of friends with a different skin colour requires rejection of the 'Other' and appears later. Aboud (2003) argues for a Piagetian basis for the move from identification with the same to rejection of Other as the move from egocentrism to the increasing ability to decentre and to be aware of difference. This awareness of difference means for developmentalists, such as Aboud et al (2003) and McGlothlin et al (2005) that where there are friendships between those with different skin colours, these decline with age as children become part of social and, it could be argued, ethnic groups and come to reject the Other. At one level, this seems a very worrying argument as it suggests that as children are more able to 'decentre' the developmental tendency is not to accept and engage with difference but to withdraw from it.

Whilst these studies seem to equate ethnicity with skin colour, it is also important to note that there is considerable divergence in the way that ethnicity is conceived in the literature. The term 'ethnicity' was used originally to refer to people who were not Hellenic, and later, not Jewish and then not Christian (see O'Hagan 1999, Malesevic 2004). Hence its meaning could be seen to lie in cultural and religious beliefs and practices as much as in race and skin colour. Ethnicity is discussed in relation to similarity and difference, kinship, history, countries of origin, language, religion, power, politics, economics, skin colour, and social and cultural practices. Much of this literature, as, Oommen (2001), Malesevic (2004) and Verkuyten (2005), for example, note, tends to use the term 'ethnic identity' interchangeably with racial identity and with cultural identity. Jenkins (1996), Bader (2001), Verkuyten (2005) and Nayak (2006) also point to the way in which the literature is marked by a tendency to view ethnicity in essentialist terms and see it as fixed before birth and into the future beyond the individual by a connection to a heritage and some form of home land (even if these are imagined, as in Kaufman's 2006 usage). The present study seeks to re-conceptualise friendship and aspects of identity such as gender and ethnicity away from purely essentialist readings of fixity and internal developmental process.

Despite the concerns of the above studies with traditional psychological and developmental accounts, the past twenty years have, however, also brought considerable changes to the ways in which we study and conceive of children. Challenges to the 'grand narratives' (Lyotard, 1984) of developmental psychology have emerged from a number of sources. Critical psychology has questioned the supposed lessons of developmental psychology (see, for example, Burman 1999, 2008; Morss 1996; James 1999; Walkerdine 2002) and the sociology of childhood has emerged as a new discipline (see, for example James 1996, James and Prout 1997, Corsaro 2005) offering the insight that how we view children is in large part a social and cultural construct. The work of Corsaro (1985, 1994, 2005) is seen as particularly significant in making children in their social worlds the focus for study, rather than the individual, and in arguing that 'friendship is also a collective and cultural process' (Corsaro 1994, 2). This view of friendship will be central to the present paper.

There is a growing body of research regarding the social worlds of children and aspects of their identities such as ethnicity and gender that draws upon alternative perspectives. The work of Connolly (1998) and of van Ausdale and Feagin (2001) has been particularly significant in using ethnography to provide an alternative to experimental developmental models and in examining the ways in which race plays a significant role in children's social worlds. Connolly (1998) draws upon Bourdieu's notions of habitus, capital and field in conceptualising how different forms of identity are formed and come to influence how we understand and act in the world. Whilst there is recognition of individual agency, the freedoms we have are those of the habitus and, therefore, are only those that individuals know and have experienced. Discourses of race and gender are seen, for example, as operating to affect how we understand the world and 'the habitus acts unconsciously to organise our social experiences and to encourage us to think and behave in certain ways' (Connolly 1998, 18). Capital is conceived of as the resources available to us and leads to the development and extension of the habitus and gives access to power and influence. He talks also of how

social capital affects the formation of relationships and of how cultural capital gives access to what is seen as important in particular communities. Connolly makes the point that we cannot understand how children make sense of race and respond to racial difference simply by looking at the local because the national is hugely significant. Drawing upon these ideas, Brooker (2002) examines how the cultural capital that may be valued in the family and in the local minority ethnic community may not be valued by the white majority at local and national level and examines the difficulties that the children of such families face as they enter into the school system. In this sense, Brooker begins to point to the ways in which aspects of identity beyond skin colour affect the ways in which we understand ourselves and are understood by others. This is seen as significant to the present paper which is interested in the ways in which such aspects may be experienced and performed in children's lives and come to affect how children relate to and become friends with each other.

Butler's work on gender is also seen as significant in the present study in challenging the orthodoxy of developmental psychology in terms of both gender and ethnicity. In place of a model of identity being played out in an interior body space, Butler (1999) argues that identity should be thought of as being played out in exterior space and on the body. Gender and ethnicity are understood by Butler as negotiated in relation with each other, being foregrounded and back-grounded in different situations. She maintains that the illusion of fixed and essential internalised identities is created through culturally and politically regulated, repeated and stylised performances that are '... instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous the *appearance of substance* is precisely that ...a performative accomplishment which the social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief' (Butler 1999, 179). She also argues that occasional failures of repetition and stylisation reveal the ways in which identities are illusory. Thus we begin to move towards a view of aspects of identity as performative.

The work of Barth (1966, 1989) has also been particularly significant in reconceptualising ethnicity away from essentialist readings of fixity and developmental process. For Barth, 'ethnic identity' relies in part on how we see ourselves but, also, crucially, on how others see us in any given situation. Barth's claim is that 'ethnic identity' is a performance in relation to a boundary but that boundary is permeable, porous and plastic rather than fixed. Following Barth, Nederveen Pieterse (1997, 370) argues that 'ethnicity is an inherently unstable category – as a constructed community ... its logic is that of imagination and imagination is a social practice'. Thus, according to Jenkins (1996), ethnicity is seen to be a fluid aspect of both collective and individual social identity, concerned with cultural differentiation but rooted in and the product of social interaction. Thus whilst traditions, conventions, rituals and practices are developed in relation to ethnic, religious and cultural groups which are seen as coming to define the essence of particular ethnic groups, Nayak (2006, 416) argues that ethnic identities are 'a fiction only ever given substance to through the illusion of performance, action and utterance, where repetition makes (them) appear as-if-real'. For Nayak (2006) power operates within communities to suggest the value of particular performances in which ethnic and cultural identities are tenuously stitched together in time from the splintering, the ambiguities, the places between, the excluded and the overlaps of the difference and deferral implied in the hybridity of the borderline. These unstable and performative conceptions of ethnicity are considered helpful in the present study which seeks to examine how experiences and performances of ethnicity may come to affect the friendships that children make.

There is also a significant body of work that has used the ideas of Foucault (1998, 2002) and post-colonialism to challenge the dominance of developmental psychology in understanding young children's ethnicity (see, for example, Grieshaber and Cannella 2001a, 2001b; Cannella and Viruru 2004; Rhedding-Jones 2001, 2002; MacNaughton 2005). MacNaughton (2005), for example, draws upon Foucault (1998, 2002) and post-colonial theory to examine the ways in which children's friendship preferences are the result not of developmental processes but of the way in which, even in

postcolonial times, power operates through individuals, families, early childhood and other institutions and the state to ensure that whiteness and its customs and practices are taken for granted as the norm, even where they are not (as was the case in the present study) and therefore exclude children who are not white in the process. However, as Skattebol (2005) notes, there is little critical theory regarding how children are positioned and take up positions in relation to ethnicity through their engagement in every day social and cultural practices and these processes are considered significant in this paper in terms of how they are then played out in and relate to and affect children's friendships.

The work of Wenger (1998) is seen as useful in establishing a theoretical framework that fuses the internal with the social in a constant interplay of negotiated and distributed iterative practices spanning the individual and the communities of practice which s/he encounters. The kindergarten context is seen as forming a community of practice that incorporates the children, their parents, caregivers and relatives and the staff of the kindergarten (though with differing amounts of power and influence) in which experiences of friendship and ethnicity are negotiated, lived out and reformed. These understandings and performances are seen in turn as coming to affect how children see and relate to each other. Relationships between people in a community of practice 'are complex mixtures of power and dependenceexpertise and helplessness.... authority and collegiality.....resistance and compliance....trust and suspicion, friendship and hatred' (Wenger 1998, 77). In this model, there is no division between the individual and the social, each co-constructs the other. Whilst Wenger (1998) sees the formation of identities and relations being forged in local communities, the present study draws upon Foucault (1998, 2002) in beginning to articulate how children's experiences of 'ethnic identity' and of relationships with others are constructed through the historically, politically, culturally and socially determined discourses that operate in society and which determine how we live in the world and how the world is understood. Thus this paper is particularly concerned to move beyond the internal accounts offered by developmental psychology and the social and post - structural accounts offered by the sociology of childhood to

conceptualise aspects of ethnicity and friendship as emerging from and being played out amidst discourses of power in the interface between inextricably linked internal processes and social practices.

What this paper also seeks to do, unlike most previous work, is to offer some insights into the process of internalisation of external every day experiences. Here, we turn to Lacan (1989) who sees the child's sense of self and identity as emerging from what he describes as the 'mirror stage' where a relationship is established between the 'organism and its reality' (1989, 4). Awareness of self in the mirror is played out against the sense of self as asserted and projected but also in relation to other people as they reflect back elements of who the child is and is becoming. This awareness, for Lacan, is, however, based on the illusions and fantasies of the mirror and can never bring satisfaction despite apparent pleasure (*jouissance*) and brings about a lack that results in a desire of the Other that can never be fulfilled. Žižek (1989) draws upon Lacan (1989) and takes up the notion of *jouissance*, arguing that our sense of pleasure and enjoyment is always located in the Other. Since *jouissance* exists only outside oneself in the Other, happiness, enjoyment and contentment can never be attained and so the unconscious develops fantasies of antagonism in relation to the perceived advantages of the Other, which Žižek sees as the basis of 'ethnic identity' and enmity. In the present paper, this is considered very important in thinking about how children's friendships may be affected by experiences of lack of understanding and marginalisation. In a similar vein, Bhabha (1994, 64) claims, drawing upon Derrida (2002), that what is significant to identity is not the Other but 'the disturbing distance in-between' self and Other, a non - place of difference (in Derrida's sense (2002) of both difference and deferral) that unsettles any notion of clear boundaries or binaries from which he argues that ethnic and cultural difference emerges. This place of difference where we are affected by the shadow of the Other is important to the way in which the relationships between children's ethnicity and friendships are theorised in the present paper. This begins to move us towards a view of the relationship between ethnicity and friendship as being shaped through our experiences amidst discourses of power of the things that we say or do not say about ourselves,

the things that we do or do not do, the things that happen or do not happen, through the things that others say or do not say about us and through the sense that others make of what we do or do not do, say or do not say.

Methodological Details

The research was carried out using an ethnographic approach. Whilst the term ethnography is used to mean very different things, Atkinson et al (2001) note that most approaches, including my own, have in common the use of participant observation in order to seek to understand how people interpret the world and their experiences. They also tend to involve collecting very detailed descriptions of the field of study which are then used to generate theory. Following James (1999), Nilsen (2005) and Belanger and Connelly (2007), I sought to use research methods that minimised the risks of speaking for rather than listening to the children. These dangers arose doubly, rather in the way that Cannella and Lincoln (2007) identify, from the study being concerned with young children and from many of them being Pakistani British when I am male, adult and White British. It required a complex model of what it means to engage with children's voices. Unlike most other previous similar ethnographic studies of young children, such as those by Connolly (1998) and van Ausdale and Feagin (2001), I was faced with the challenge of seeking to study children's friendships and how they related to gender and ethnicity in a kindergarten where there were very few children of White British English – speaking origin and where few of the Pakistani British children spoke more than a few words of English. Similar challenges were faced by Corsaro (1985, 1994, 2005) in his ethnographic studies of children's friendships in Italy but I did not have the time to learn Punjabi (as he learnt Italian) and did not have the resources to work with an interpreter (which would have brought its own issues any way) and so listening to the voices of both Pakistani British and White British children involved studying their play, actions and interactions, as a means of giving them a thickness of 'voice' that was made up of more than their words. Pahl (2007, 187) took a similar approach and argues that, in this way, a 'complex web of meaning ... became embedded and could be given a provisional, interpretative context'.

Whilst space does not permit a detailed consideration of research paradigms, critical realism (Bhaskar 1998a, 1998b) underpins the stance of the present paper. Critical realism argues that the social world pre-exists people and cannot be reduced simply to human agents and actions but is not independent of them. The maintenance and development of any given society is seen as depending on the actions of human beings in specific places and at particular times but these are inhibited by social structures, which are themselves subject to change. The effects of these structures can be seen in every day life but there is no one-to-one relationship between effects, causes and structures and there may be numerous effects with numerous causes. The notion that there are effects that can be seen, however, leads Bhaskar (1998b) to argue that there must be pre-existing causal structures. Causes are viewed by Bhaskar (1998b) as tendencies rather than as certainties and their effects may not be seen or even actually occur. These causal tendencies are seen by Bhaskar, however, as evidence of an external reality, independent of human perceptions of it. In the case of this study, this means questioning what the relationship between ethnic and gender identities and friendship must mean for the children to act as they do.

Critical realist perspectives maintain that a key concern for the social scientist is to provide an adequate account of observable effects. Thus, the ethnographic approach used, with its detailed observations of everyday activity, is well suited to this purpose. It is not without its challenges, however, as Porter (1993) points out, because 'the representational aspect of research remains problematic' since 'the issue is not simply how the researcher perceives data, it is also how s/he portrays it' (594). Describing the effects carefully is very important because an inadequate description of effects will lead to difficulties in seeking to understand the causal tendencies that underpin them. Sayer (1998) thus argues that any explanation will not do as well as any other because explanations need to be 'rational abstractions' rather than 'chaotic conceptions'. There is, therefore, a concern to carry out research that is as careful and as authentic as possible in order to study the observable effects in what the children do and say and do not do and do not

say in order to seek to understand the causal tendencies (in terms of gender and ethnicity, for example) that lead to the friendship behaviours that the children display.

Findings and discussion

As noted earlier, despite the way in which the present paper has sought to theorise ethnicity as performative rather than essence, the majority of children's playmate choices did suggest essentialism in terms of both ethnicity and gender. This is not, however, considered to be a reason to argue for a purely developmental and essentialist basis for the relationship between ethnicity and friendship. What it calls for is further examination of the practices of the kindergarten and how these might be seen to shape friendship, ethnicity and participation and lead to children's friendships choices as appearing to be solely the result of developmental and essentialist processes. First there were what might be called 'special events', such as Eid, Christmas and trips to the seaside, which tended to create the strongest sense of boundary between the ethnic groups. There were then also the 'every day' activities of the kindergarten where differences between the ethnic groups were less marked but which cast shadows and silences surrounding the children's responses to the activities. There was a strong sense of the majority of White British staff planning activities which some of the children's previous cultural practices and experiences, particularly those of Pakistani British – heritage, has not prepared them for. What is suggested here is that these activities shaped children's responses in ways that were not conducive to ready friendships between children of Pakistani British – heritage and White British – heritage.

At the risk of turning the seaside into the exotic, a visit to a beach in the North-West of England presented particular boundaries which affected how the children saw themselves and others. The visit involved the children spending some time on the beach but a minority of Pakistani British children were very wary of the sand, appearing to dislike the feel of it on their feet. Although attempts to reassure the children were made by a teacher and a bilingual

kindergarten assistant in both Punjabi and English, the children remained cautious, pointing to the way in which language depends on the experiences that it represents having cultural meaning. In addition to this discomfort, in a conversation between three of children, one of the children, Adnan, was also puzzled by all the sunbathers who were on the beach and asked 'why they all dead?' Zahir tried to reassure him by explaining 'no they asleep'. Michael, however, appeared exasperated and shouted 'no!!! - silly - they are just getting a tan' and then laughed. One of the kindergarten staff heard this conversation, said nothing to the children but laughed and recounted what had been said to another member of staff, who also laughed. It is suggested that these experiences shaped the children's sense of themselves and how they experienced and related to others. In this case, only Michael seems to have previously had access to the cultural understandings that the West attaches to beaches and sunbathing and his knowledge and their lack of it casts shadows (Bhabha 1994) between him and the two Pakistani British children that may affect how they relate to each other and the possibility of friendship between them. The laughter of the members of staff could also be seen to bind them in a complicity that marks out the Pakistani British children as Other.

In terms of the more 'everyday', an activity in which the children were expected to take part early in their time at kindergarten was hand painting. However, as with the beach, even when explained in Punjabi, this was an experience that seemed very unfamiliar and which some of the Pakistani British children resisted. The following example from my field notes is representative of a number of similar instances

Hammad arrives at Kindergarten and stands on the edge of the room watching but does not go to any of the activities. Close to where he is standing, one of the kindergarten assistants, Joy, is calling the children over in turn to have their hands painted and then printed on to paper. She calls out and extends her hand to him:

‘Hammad – hand painting – come to Mrs Poulter’.

Hammad frowns and shakes his head. She goes over to him and leads him to the printing table. He does not want to come and shakes his head and pulls away but she gets him over to the table.

‘Hammad – spread fingers and I paint’

Hammad shakes his head. Joy thinks he does not understand and so asks one of the bilingual kindergarten assistants, Sadiqah, to explain to him in Punjabi. Sadiqah speaks to him in Punjabi and she explains to Joy that he says that he does not want paint on his hands.

Leo arrives and asks to have his hands painted. Joy tells him to spread his fingers out and he smiles as she paints his hand and he prints it on the paper

‘See Hammad, Leo likes it’ says Joy

Leo says ‘Spread your fingers out Hammad’ as he washes his hands in the bowl.

Hammad puts his hands under the table. Sadiqah takes his hands and Hammad shakes his head and says ‘No, no’ but Joy paints them and then holds his hands down on the paper. He looks at his hand and at the paper and frowns.

‘Wash your hand now Hammad’ Leo says

Bodily as well as verbal, resistance to hand painting and the beach suggest the way in which activities and experiences can be understood as sites of performances in relation to ethnicity, gender and friendship. In these cases, it

seems as though the previous experiences of some of the Pakistani British children may not have involved hand painting or going to the beach. Boundary moments (Barth, 2000) such as these provided some of the clearest signs of the ways in which the children understood the world and of how these understandings were shaped by their experiences as members of particular families and communities or a particular habitus (as Brooker 2002, following Bourdieu would argue). In this case, most of the White British children appear to have accumulated knowledge of hand printing and of why people go to and lie on beaches but some of the Pakistani British children had not so far done so and this led to confusion and resistant behaviours that led their identities to be performed in particular sorts of ways and which separated them from the other children. All of this again points to the way in which shadows of what is not understood appear as difference that is significant in terms of what shapes the relationship between ethnicity and friendship. In the cases of the running on the beach and the hand painting, it could be argued further that, since the children who did not participate would have been aware that some did so readily, they would again be marked out as different. Equally, it could be argued that White British children experienced their own ethnicity more explicitly than they would have in an all-white kindergarten through being aware of some of the Pakistani British children not being able to participate in the same way. Following Bhabha (1994, 85), what we see is how 'the shadow of the Other falls upon the self' and serves to mark out what is not shared. As MacNaughton argues (2005, 165) what was needed was the ability to read 'for Otherwise .. imagining how people 'Other' to the culturally and "racially" elite and privileged ... might understand something'. As it was, there was no such reading and the children could be considered to both experience and internalise a sense of marginalisation and difference, feelings which, it is argued, come to shape children's experiences of each other and their friendships. Thus, it is argued here that ethnic and friendship identities are the result not only of developmental processes but of the performance of culturally defined activities that include some and exclude others and draw attention to difference in ways that are observed and become internalised by the children.

In the face of such experiences, it was noticeable during freely chosen activities that family appeared to be a particularly significant factor in terms of the friendships of some Pakistani British children, with several cousins starting kindergarten and spending most of their time playing together. These friendships appeared to be based on the kinship that Verkuyten (2005) maintains emerges from culture, race, gender, language and common life experiences. This tendency to seek out cousins suggests the significance of family and how, for these children, as they bumped against an unfamiliar community of practice which was not completely understood or readily accessible to them and where some the children and staff spoke a language in which they were not wholly fluent, they turned to family, or to the possibilities as defined by the habitus, in a way that shaped participation. This reliance on family meant that they did not form friendships with either other Pakistani British children or with White British children. Whilst this could appear to be explained in terms of Aboud's claim (2003) for identification with the same as an internal categorising developmental process, the explanation may be rather more complicated here as such tendencies are played out in interaction with the operation of the habitus as it leads the children to seek out family to enable them to deal with an unfamiliar context. This is not to deny the shadows of division that could be seen to be created in the process as other Pakistani British and White British children may have experienced the friendships of the cousins as exclusive.

Celebration of Eid provided a rare occasion on which Pakistani British children experienced familiarity in the kindergarten and on which White British children encountered Otherness. Even here, however, there was some initial sense of boundary for the Pakistani British children when a ry assistant read a story about preparing for Eid with no bilingual support even though the majority or the children were Punjabi – speakers and the children struggled to understand what it was about. Consequently, they showed little interest in the story and sat very quietly. The ry assistant asked them if they had Qu'rans at home but only one said that he had. Concerned by the lack of interest the ry assistant went to get items from an Eid display that had been set up in the ry. All of the Pakistani British children recognised the mendhi box though the White British

children did not. One Pakistani British girl who was usually very quiet and who spoke very little English became very animated when she saw the patterns. One of the boys said they needed to put it on their hands and let it dry and then wipe it off. Another boy, who often seemed to understand very little, suddenly became extremely animated and said his mum put it on her hands. The kindergarten assistant then brought in clothes, hats and shoes and the Pakistani British children started to clap and laugh when she came back. They got very excited and started to speak rapidly to each other in Punjabi. Two of the children said 'mendhi – mine mum'. The children were taken to look at the Eid display just outside the story room. They got very excited and ran up and down the corridor. The White British children, however, stayed seated in the story room, appearing not to know what was happening. Here again the children would have experienced each other very differently from how they did at other times, again casting shadows of difference. The episode points again to the way in which it is argued an activity that is familiar to a particular group, reinforces the sense of identity and belonging of that group but creates a sense of boundary for those who do not experience belonging and participation. The shadow that is cast by the boundary is the place of difference and unfamiliarity that makes friendships difficult to form where understandings are not shared. 'Reading Otherwise' (MacNaughton 2005) is a two way process and here we see a rare example of the way in which failure to do so created further divisions.

Whilst ethnicity may appear to be the basis on which children chose friends, the way in which this happened is much more complex than it might at first appear. Skin colour, kinship, familiarity could be seen to draw children together or push them apart in fixed and essentialist ways but the process by which it happened was played out in the everyday activities of the kindergarten and its dynamic nature offered space to reshape and redefine ethnic identities and friendships. This could have created possibilities to renegotiate those boundaries and how children conceived of themselves and their friends. The kindergarten could have provided a space where ethnic identities and friendships were challenged, renegotiated and transformed. It could, following Brah (1996, 208) have offered diaspora spaces where:

'multiple subject positions are juxtaposed, contested, proclaimed, or disavowed; where the permitted and prohibited perpetually interrogate; and where the permitted and the transgressive imperceptibly mingle'. It could have sought to occupy the 'overlapping space between the fading of identity and its inscription' (Bhabha (1994, 80), leading to the performance of new identities, new communities of early childhood practice, thereby creating a space that offered greater friendship possibilities between the two major ethnic groups but the practices and experiences offered often cast shadows that were reinforcing and reproducing rather than being transformational.

Examining the invisible and the shadows: ethnicity and friendship

In summary, a number of factors seem important in understanding how the children negotiated their place in the kindergarten and their relationships with other children. These should not be understood as constituting a single uncomplicated narrative, however, because the relationship between the empirical and the actual is contested in critical realism and the tendencies that we have been able to explore are to be understood only as indications of how meanings become attached to ethnicity and friendship. The focus in this paper has been particularly on the interaction of ethnicity with children's choice of friends but there were many occasions where possible causal tendencies in the world of the actual were much more complex and where the inter-relationship between ethnicity, gender, class and family circumstances appeared particularly significant in determining which children became friends.

My observations did suggest, however, that it was unusual for children to play with other children who did not share their ethnicity (and their sex). Whilst skin colour may have played a part in children's choices, it has been argued that differences in ethnic, linguistic and cultural capital were very significant factors. Thus the children's identities are not to be understood as wholly driven from within along essentialist lines, as traditional developmental perspectives would suggest, but as being shaped by the children's experiences and interactions which affected how their identities came to be performed. The nursery's practices led to the children's identities being

performed and internalised in particular sorts of ways that were familiar ('like us') or unfamiliar ('not like us') to other children according to their previous experiences. The children who did not know how to engage encountered 'disidentification' (Hodges 1998) or marginalisation (Wenger 1998) from those who did and were encountered by the children who did know how to engage as 'not like us', as not our friends, as Other. Equally those who did know how to engage experienced themselves differently because of those who did not and formed friendships with similar children. Thus these identity performances in relation to the activities offered seemed to be internalised and to come to affect the friendships that children formed with each other.

Hence the children's ethnic identities and friendships, it is argued, were shaped by the internalisation of what they saw and heard as they engaged in the kindergarten's activities. The process of internalisation was one, following Zizek (1989) and Bhabha (1994), which could be seen to cast shadows of perceived advantage and disadvantage, belonging and marginalisation, sowing the seeds, potentially, for later more formal discrimination. That discrimination emerges from the internalisation of social practices can be seen to offer opportunities to challenge it but the subtlety of the process by which alienation and discrimination occur through what is not done, not said and not shared poses particular challenges for staff in seeking to see what is largely unseen and to change performances in ways that open up other friendship possibilities.

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